

From the Weston Historical Society archives...

My Life in Weston Village (1935 to 1945)

Part 3: Weston's Tinsmith

by Jean Gove-Carbone

In the 1930s, unlike today, every small town needed the services of a tinsmith. Tin items were very necessary and were used in all houses, shops, public buildings, and especially on small farms. This was certainly true of Weston when I was a child. With a phone call or a request made in person, the tinsmith would come to one's home or business and measure whatever needed to be fabricated, and then, back at his shop, would set to work making the items requested. When enough of the tin items were finished, the tinsmith would make a run and deliver everything to the addresses in his little record book before starting on the next batch of orders.

You might ask what a tinsmith would make. There were surprisingly many items that were made of tin, and it seemed that demand was always there. A few uses for tin would be piping for stoves and furnaces, eaves for rain runoff, downspouts to carry the water away from foundations, water and feed troughs for animals, and perhaps even sections of tin roofs.



Weston was a fast-growing village in the thirties and tradesmen, including tinsmiths, were in high demand. This southward looking view of Main Street (now Weston Road) was taken near the corner of present day John Street. Postcard supplied by S. Lawrence.

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Weston was no different than all of the other small towns in the area, and we had our own tinsmith in the person of Joe Ward. Mr. Ward was a kindly man and short

in stature, while his wife was equally cheerful but was very tall and thin. The Ward's house and Mr. Ward's tin shop were off George Street on an extension of Fern Avenue.

Only two houses were on this very short spur, with both of them on the left side. The Fern Avenue extension was very narrow even for one vehicle at a time. It was also barely paved and ran only a short distance before it ended at the railroad tracks. When one was driving down the road, Mr. Ward's house came first and farther down, alarmingly near the railroad tracks, was the second house, belonging to Mr. and Mrs. Douglass. I used to wonder, as a kid, what the sound must have been like when a train thundered through in the middle of the night, since the Douglass' house was so close to the tracks.

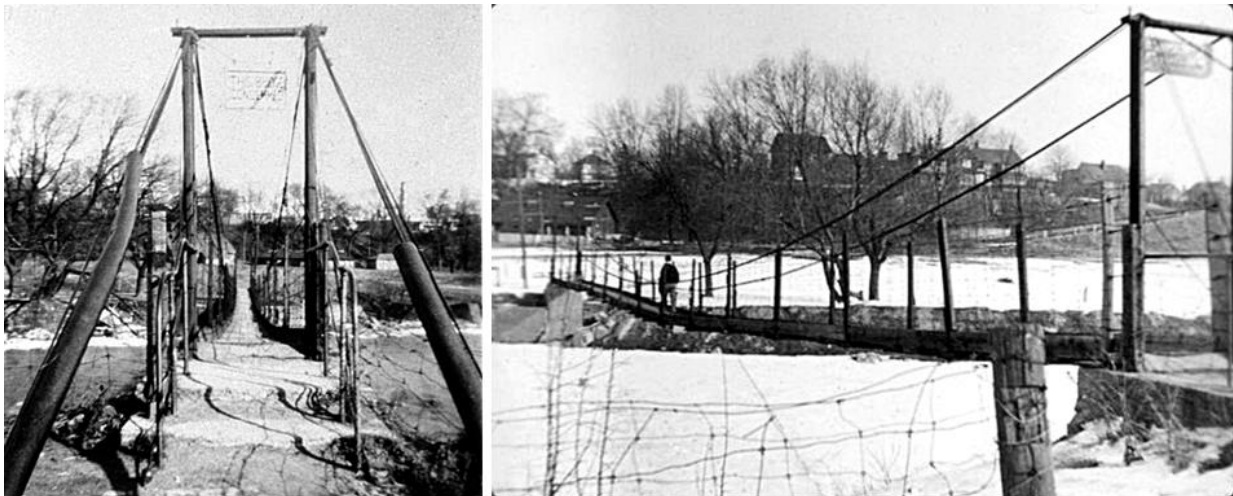
The proximity of the Douglass' house to the railroad tracks had special significance to me. While my family did not live near the railroad tracks, we lived right next to the streetcar tracks on Main Street. I can remember times when we had guests at our house and we would be sitting around in the living room talking when all of a sudden our guests would sit straight up in their seats and, looking alarmed, would exclaim, "What is that?!?" Only then would we consciously hear the streetcar rumbling down the hill outside. We were so acclimated to the sound that we didn't notice it unless guests who were not familiar with it brought it to our attention. Maybe it was the same for the Douglass family and the trains, though I can't imagine sleeping through such a racket!

Anyway, Mr. and Mrs. Douglass had a five year old son, younger than me at the time, who used to walk down to Mr. Ward's house to play whenever he saw kids there. Mr. Ward had a daughter of his own, Greta, who was my age, so the three of us and the Ward's dog were in his tin shop many times. The shop itself was built onto the back of the house. It consisted of one large room, on the left side of which were the raw supplies, mostly consisting of many 5' sheets of tin leaned against the wall, slightly curved by the collective weight of the stack. On the floor were scattered all sorts of piping sections in the most commonly requested sizes and shapes and lengths. On the right side of the room stood Mr. Ward's work table, which was about a yard wide and seven or more feet long.

The thickness of the table always caught my eye as it was no less than 6" thick and made of solid wood which was covered by hundreds if not thousands of

hammer marks from use over the years. There were so many dents from past hammer blows that I could not see a smooth spot anywhere on the table top. At the end of this long table was a pile of tin pieces that had been finished and were ready to be delivered. Each piece had a paper taped to it with the owner's name and address. After the finished pile had become large enough, Mr. Ward would hop in his old car to make deliveries, and we often had the pleasure of joy rides in the car at the same time.

After retiring from the tin trade in the early 1950s, Mr. and Mrs. Ward together with their dog moved across the Humber to a quiet street named Raymore Drive. They looked forward to a peaceful existence over there. But it was not to be! The Ward's move to Raymore Drive provided them instead with a potentially life-threatening adventure. Hurricane Hazel swept through Weston in 1954 and caused great destruction. The course of the Humber River was forever changed and one of my favorite sites, the swing bridge, was swept away by the torrential currents and sheets of rain.



Two images of the "Swing Bridge" that once crossed the Humber River adjacent to former Raymore Drive (south of present day Lion's Park). The bridge had fallen into disrepair when these photographs were taken. In 1958, the surge created by Hurricane Hazel dislodged the bridge from its foundation and toppled it into the river. Unfortunately, according to author Jim Gifford¹, its steel cables held firm and the broken structure actually redirected the raging river toward ill-fated Raymore Drive where Mr. and Mrs. Ward lived.

Also an island in the middle of the Humber, the scene of many of our childhood games and frolics, disappeared in this amazing rush of water. There are many books that have been written about the devastation of Hazel, and many years

later, Greta Ward shared one of her copies with me along with her personal reminiscences of that event.



After several harrowing attempts, the Wards were rescued from the roof of their house by a helicopter, but not before it was struck by another house, which had been dislodged by the flood.

On the evening that Hazel reached Weston, in mid-October of the year, Mr. and Mrs. Ward watched the storm batter the house outside as the water steadily rose around their new property and showed no signs of receding. As the water continued to rise, Mr. Ward made his way to the attic and managed to rig up something on which to stand, and then chopped a hole in the roof which was large enough through which to squeeze his wife and him and the dog in order to access the very top of the house. They all sat there on the outside of the wet and slanted roof as the water raged past them just below. They could only wait and hope for rescue. They watched as all but two of the nearby homes on Raymore Drive were washed away. Then, the unthinkable happened: their beloved dog slipped off the wet roof and fell into the water, and they could do nothing to reach him as he was swept away in the rushing current downstream.

Rescue did eventually come after a long and terrifying ordeal. And best of all, Greta later told me of the happiest of endings. Though the house was nearly destroyed, the Wards found their dog the next day in a hastily arranged animal rescue station in Weston, along with many other animals who had become separated from their frantic owners in the chaos.

Anyone wanting to know more about this amazing time for the people of Weston can learn more, as several books were published in the 1950's. Hazel was an exciting chapter in the history of Weston and is a very worthwhile read.



Jean Gove-Carbone, shown here beside the Humber River (at age 11), is the youngest daughter of Ida and James Gilbert Gove. In October 2009, Heritage Toronto memorialized James Gove's contribution to Weston with a commemorative plaque, which was placed in Little Avenue Memorial Park. From 1930 to about 1960, Mr. Gove, a master stonemason, built Weston's distinctive Humberstone walls and beautiful memorial Cenotaph.